

BEAVERTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

GENERAL ORDER

NUMBER: 15.02.00
SUBJECT: MEDIA RELATIONS
EFFECTIVE: AUGUST 1, 1999
REVIEW: AUGUST 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007

1. PURPOSE. The news media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television) can have a major effect on the public image of the department. In addition, the media can be valuable allies in alerting citizens to crime problems and enlisting the aid of the public in identifying suspects. For these reasons, positive media relations can be extremely beneficial to law enforcement.

2. POLICY. A well-informed public is essential to the existence of a democratic nation. A free press serves the public by supplying needed information, by stimulating thought, and by providing a medium for expression. Crime, its results, and the efforts to combat it are all matters of public concern. The department is regularly involved in events at which members of the news media are properly present and performing their task of gathering information. It is the policy of this department to actively seek and establish a cooperative climate in which the news media may obtain information on matters of public interest in a manner which does not hamper police operations. However, certain information must be withheld from the news media in order to protect the constitutional rights of an accused, to avoid interfering with an investigation, or because it is legally privileged.

A. Statements on department policy. Statements to the media regarding department policies, philosophy or enforcement procedures shall only be made by the Chief of Police or his designated representative.

B. Press Releases. Press releases will be produced when the investigation or incident requires a more detailed account of the incident be made to the public, or when other circumstances exist that would make the issuing of a press release an effective tool to accomplish our goals.

3. PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION. The Chief of Police or his designee shall be responsible of the following public information functions:

- Assisting media personnel in covering routine news stories and at the scene of incidents.

- Preparing and distributing department news releases.
- Arranging for and assisting at news conferences.
- Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about incidents, victims, witnesses and suspects.

A. Media release format. A press release shall be prepared on department letterhead using the following format:

MEDIA RELEASE

1. INCIDENT TYPE:
2. INCIDENT DATE AND TIME:
3. INCIDENT LOCATION:
4. VICTIM (when reasonable and applicable):
5. SUSPECT (except when information may hinder the investigation or juveniles per ORS):
6. CHARGES AND BAIL (if applicable):
7. SUMMARY (brief summary of the circumstances regarding the incident):
8. CONTACT (specify department member):

B. Planned interviews. Requests for interviews with department representatives shall be coordinated through the Chief of Police or his designee. A better presentation will be made if information is provided to the media by a specialist or a member who has the answers to specific questions. If a reporter contacts a department member seeking an interview, the Chief of Police or his designee shall be notified. If at all possible, the Chief of Police or his designee shall be present during the interview. If the Chief of Police or his designee cannot be present, the department member shall brief the Chief of Police relating the information released at the press interview.

4. COURTESY TO THE MEDIA. Officers and employees will treat bona fide representatives of the press and broadcast media in a courteous, professional manner. Any request by the media for confidential information or access to restricted areas should be politely referred to a supervisor.

A. Media access to department records. Inquiries by the media for information are to be screened by the public information officer or the on-duty supervisor. The log is not routinely subject to public disclosure and may contain information which could prejudice the rights and privileges of the persons identified therein.

B. Media inquiries into case investigation status and other business. Media inquiries regarding the progress of an investigation or other department business should be referred to a public information officers, or his/her absence, a supervisor. Referrals in the face of persistence will be emphasized on the grounds that the public information officer or supervisor will have the most accurate and complete information available.

C. Response to controversial questions. Officers/employees who are confronted by members of the media with questions of a controversial nature or information which might compromise an investigation will refer the inquiry or request to a supervisor or to the public information officer.

5. RELEASE OF INFORMATION ON SUSPECTS, CASES, AND DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS. Release of any information to the media regarding suspects, cases, and Department operations will conform to this policy.

A. Restrictions on release of information. The release of certain types of information by law enforcement personnel, the bench and bar, and publication thereof by the news media, generally tends to create prejudice without serving a significant law enforcement or public interest purpose. The following information will not be released by members of this department except as authorized by the Chief of Police:

1. Opinions on a defendant's character, his guilt or innocence;
- 2.. Admissions, confessions or the content of a statement or alibi attributable to the defendant;
3. References to the results of investigative tests (e.g., polygraph, ballistics, psychiatric);
4. Statements about credibility or the anticipated testimony of witnesses;
5. Opinions regarding the evidence or arguments of a case;
6. Precise descriptions of items seized or discovered during the investigation;
7. Aggregated amounts of moneys or valuables taken during the commission of a robbery or burglary (lessor amounts are at the discretion of the PIO); or
8. Victim information of sexual assault cases.

B. Release of information regarding individuals arrested. Release of information regarding individuals arrested, but not yet formally charged, will be restricted to the following:

1. Suspect's name, date of birth, sex, marital status, occupation and address (except when information may hinder the investigation or juveniles per ORS);

2. The alleged offense, victim's name, age and address (except sexual assault or child abuse).
3. Identity of the investigating and arresting units and/or agencies, and the length of the investigation; and
4. Circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, including the time and place of the arrest, resistance, pursuit, and possession of weapons (department representatives generally do not mention caliber of weapons or investigative details.)

6. PHOTOGRAPHS.

- A. All requests from media representatives for department photographs shall be directed to the Chief of Police.
- B. Department members may not prevent photographs to be taken of a suspect in transit; however, the suspect shall not be posed with a department member.
- C. With the permission of a supervisor, department members may release, through the public information officer, photographs of wanted subjects when public assistance may result in apprehension.

7. RELEASE OF INFORMATION. When an event being investigated is of such a spectacular or unusual nature as to stimulate community interest, the news media will be notified. Normally, it is the responsibility of the public information officer or on duty supervisor at the scene to make such notification; however, when there is an event of major proportions, the Chief of Police should be notified and may assume responsibility for the release of information.

A. Press relations procedures at incident scenes. Department members shall adhere to the following concerning press relations:

1. As soon as it is reasonable and/or practical, crime scene tape shall be deployed in order to, in part, delineate those areas that are restricted to public safety personnel.
2. With regard to major crime occurrences, media access will be restricted until permission is given by the officer or supervisor in charge. The media does not have the right to enter private property without consent of the property owner. Admittance to crime scenes on public property may also be limited if a reporter's presence would unreasonably obstruct or interfere with the investigation (such as gathering evidence, interviewing witnesses and victims, and preservation of evidence, etc.) or hamper the carrying out of police or fire duties (handling an emergency situation).
3. In danger areas, the media may enter at their own risk only after some reasonable level of order or control has been restored.

4. At the scene of an emergency operation (fire, explosion, or cave-in, for example), an officer may deny or limit access to the media if their presence creates an unsafe situation for themselves or others.

5. Relationships between the media and members of the department shall be maintained in a courteous, professional manner. If an officer is confronted with inquiries which raise question in the officer's mind as to whether and what response is proper, the question should be referred to the public information officer.

6. Questions relating to matters of policy shall be directed to the Chief of Police.

A. The Chief of Police or his designee shall be available to members of the press to assist the news media in locating reports and to answer questions.

B. The Police Chief, shift supervisor or designated public information officer will be available at the scene of unusual occurrences after being notified and will act as liaison between Department personnel and the media at the scene.

C. Normally, all press releases will be handled by the Public Information Officer.

8. ADDRESS, TELEPHONE NUMBER OF DEPARTMENT MEMBERS. Officers/employees will not divulge the address or telephone number of any other officer/employee to members of the media, or to others without appropriate authorization.

Chief of Police

Date